

Announcer:

Welcome to The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast, a podcast all about leadership, change, and personal growth. The goal? To help you lead like never before in your church or in your business. And now your host, Carey Nieuwhof.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, hey, everybody, and welcome to episode 326 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope today's episode helps you lead like never before. I think you're going to love the guest. Today's episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire and Leader's Circle, a brand new initiative I'm launching, and my guest today is Adam Duckworth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Adam has been a friend for many, many years, as you'll quickly pick up, but his life has taken a really fascinating turn over the last few years. He is the founder of Travelmation, something that he launched in 2012 really with a laptop on his sofa, and has become the fastest agency to hit the Platinum Authorized Disney Vacation Planner. It is a multiple seven figure business that has just exploded and is disrupting the travel industry. So, fascinating. If you're a student of disruption, as I am, to see what's changing, how is it changing, if you're an employer who's saying, "How do I get more motivated employees?" We're going to talk about that, and then if you're really interested in where the future is, Adam's pretty much figured that out for travel. So he is the founder and CEO of Travelmation and I'm so glad to have him on the episode today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Guys, I just want to thank you so much for doing all the sharing that you've been doing, all of the tagging on Instagram, and tagging friends that maybe need to listen to an episode, letting me know you really enjoyed it and letting the world know you really enjoyed it. So, so grateful for that. And if you're enjoying this podcast, I would love it if you would take a moment just to leave a rating and review and also to subscribe because it's absolutely free and we've got a killer guest lineup in 2020 for you. You've seen a little bit of it so far, but just fasten your seat belts. It's going to be a wonderful, wonderful year.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, some of the people I've gotten to know and started using on my own platform are Pro Media Fire, and my wife and our good friend Rob Meeder just launched the Smart Family Podcast recently. They're doing a lot of that media for us in terms of graphic design. I want you to think about what you're doing as far as Easter, which is approaching with amazing rapidity, Facebook and Instagram, really important for Easter and throughout 2020. So our friends over at Pro Media Fire have just released a new social media management plan to help you invite the community for Easter and keep your church brand strategy going throughout the year. Here's how it works. They will actually design the weekly posts for you, they'll write the messaging, get your approval, of course, and then they'll do the work for you to Facebook and Instagram. So you got about a month left until Easter.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's done-for-you social media management. So maybe you're a small church and you're like, "Yeah, I just don't have time for this." Solved. Maybe you're a much larger church and you're like, "Our team just..." Because, come on, bosses, you've thought about this. It's like, "Can you guys do a little bit more?"

You've thought that way, and guess what? Maybe outsourcing is a great solution. So you can focus on ministry while they focus on a professional social media presence for your church. You can also bundle all the plans with custom graphics and videos, all for less than the cost of a new hire. So you can get 10% off your plans for life. Go to ProMediaFire.com/Carey to access that. That's ProMediaFire.com/Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I am so excited about the launch of something brand new I'm doing, it's called The Leader's Circle. I would love to welcome you inside The Leader's Circle, but registration is only open for a few more days as this podcast goes to air. So here's what's inside The Leader's Circle. You'll get access to me and to other high capacity leaders. It's basically a place where high capacity leaders gather. I get questions every day, "Hey, can I pick your brain about this?" Inside The Leader's Circle, that's what we're going to do. There's a private forum where you can bring your questions and the group can weigh in, I'll weigh in. So will my team, also I'll do a live monthly Ask Me Anything call inside The Leader's Circle, where you can bring your leadership questions and we try to tackle them as best we can.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also, here's what's inside the Circle, done-for-you staff meetings. Just cross staff meeting prep and leadership development off your to-do list each month. Staff meetings are done-for-you with a 15 to 20-minute training video on a key topic, a printable meeting agenda, and a team application guide. Also, I give you a backgrounder. So that's a little bit extra for the senior leader or whoever you choose to share this with, where I go into the subject in a little bit more detail to give you greater mastery over it, and you can plug and play the video. It's just done-for-you, you don't have to think about it. Or if you prefer, I also can let you do it. You can just take my notes, we will give you my notes, we will give you an audio version of this so you can master the subject while you work out or in your car, and then we even give you a slide deck so that you can present it to yourself. You can be the hero, you can put me on a screen, it's totally up to you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, access to a tribe of high capacity leaders, access to me, done-for-you staff meetings and leadership development. That's what's inside The Leader's Circle, and it's curated, not overwhelming, just a few very carefully selected pieces of content every month for you and for your team. So if you want to join, head on over to TheLeadersCircle.live, that's TheLeadersCircle.live. We'll be closing registration in just a few days. I would love to welcome you inside The Leader's Circle. And now, without much further ado, my conversation with Adam Duckworth. I think you're going to find this one fascinating.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Adam, welcome back to the podcast.

Adam Duckworth:

Hey, thanks, Carey. I'm so excited to be here again after a number of years. It's great to be back.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I think it was only like two or three years ago, and at that time, you were launching a church, and now we're talking about this like rocket ride that you've been on. I mean, the place that life takes you sometimes, right?

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah, it's insane. I mean, I was on talking about Downtown Harbor Church and creating a new church plant a number of years ago, which is still going, I'm still a part of it. My role changed and I stepped back into running all volunteering in the organization versus leading the organization. That was a real healthy decision for me, but a lot can change in a couple of years, right? And here we are.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, which is insane when you think about it, Adam. So Travelmation, which is what we're going to focus on, give us an idea of what it is today, and then we're going to reverse engineer it and sort of break down the story.

Adam Duckworth:

Perfect. So I'll give you where we're at today. Travelmation is a full service travel agency. And you might ask the question, do travel agents still exist? Interestingly enough, we do and we're bringing them back in a really cool way. But we are about 400 on our team currently of people all over the country. We've had a number of folks apply from Canada, and we can't hire people from Canada, unfortunately.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's right. Is there a wall, or what happened?

Adam Duckworth:

No, it's all the legal restrictions and requirements. Interestingly enough, Carey, to hire agents in Canada, we have to have a physical brick and mortar in the province, which we do not. So there's just things that get in the way of that. That's another story for another time. But we are a travel agency of 400 agents really focused on our brand standing out versus a lot of other people in the space, and we are an Authorized Disney Vacation Planner, so we specialize in Disney destinations, yet we do it all. So we just launched our 2020 marketing campaign about a month ago called Disney and More, which is really exciting because one of the myths we run into is, "You guys book more than Disney?" So we're trying to redo how we do that. The answer is yes. But that's where we are today. We're a full service travel agency of about 400 agents around the country in the US.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And distributed. I mean, I'm talking to you, for those of you watching on YouTube. This is world headquarters, correct?

Adam Duckworth:

It is. This is world headquarters in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. You see my Disney art wall in the back?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Aha.

Adam Duckworth:

I actually have a new life size Yoda coming from my office that will be here Friday. I wish he could have joined us for the call, but he'll be here Friday. And so this is Travelmation headquarters.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So this is what's so cool. I mean, I'm at world headquarters for my company, for those of you watching this episode, which is really... This is my basement. Welcome to my basement, and it's a nice basement, but it's my basement. We did a video shoot here all morning. I had some staff in. We're doing an Airbnb retreat next week in San Diego, where I'm flying people in for that. And you're literally in... I know you designed the condo that you live in, but, I mean, it's basically a spare room, right? An office.

Adam Duckworth:

Basically a spare room, it's an office. It was an add-on, if we wanted to, for the condo. This is what they call the den. It was an add-on if we wanted to do it, and we did. And here's world headquarters.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is it for... Pardon my ignorance, but for travel agencies? Is that a large travel agency?

Adam Duckworth:

If you look at the biggest of the big, there are agencies that have thousands, upwards of 10,000 agents. They've been around for a long time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like multinational, you mean? Or-

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah. And they're probably multilevel marketing agencies, Carey, which we are not. We're not an MLM, we're not a pyramid. But in terms of the Disney space, which is the space where we exist, we would be one of the larger agencies in terms of bodies.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So yeah, for Disney, and you just got accredited by Disney. What was that? I saw that on social.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah. So it took us eight years. We started the company in 2012. When I started the company, it was just me. I like to kind of say it was just a guy on a couch with a laptop. That's all I had, that's all I was doing. And so Disney just gave us their Authorized Disney Vacation Planner Platinum designation, which basically, that means there's only one level higher than that, and that's diamond. They're the only three diamond agencies in the entire country. Most of them have been around for a long, long time. Platinum is the level that is next highest under diamond, but basically, our sales got us to the point where Disney gave us this distinction. And so, it's been really fun to watch.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's cool. And for such a new company. I mean, within a year of recording this, Thomas Cook, the largest travel agency in the world, went bankrupt, right? Belly up.

Adam Duckworth:

Correct.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I would think it's harder times, because you look at it between Airbnb and Expedia and all the sites, Hotels.com, Booking.com, where you can book all your own stuff, increasingly, that's what people are doing. So I'll just ask you this question, why would you use a travel agency these days?

Adam Duckworth:

So Carey, that's a very interesting question. So yes, you can go on your own with what they call an OTA, an online travel agency. We saw that almost kill the travel agent in, call it the early 2000s, Expedia, Orbitz, Travelocity, Priceline, Hotels.com, all that kind of stuff. We saw that almost kill the travel agent. But what people were finding is, is yes, you could go on and book on your own, a hotel, a car, a flight, those kind of things, but if you are actually going to chunk down a good piece of money on vacation, because an average family in the Midwest will spend between \$4,000 and \$6,000 on a trip to Walt Disney World, they really feel like they want to know what they're talking about. And so where we come in, especially from the perspective of not marking it up, we have been passionate about not marking travel up. There are many travel agencies that do, but we're basically free.

Adam Duckworth:

So if you are getting a service that is complimentary to you, with all accredited experts, why would you not use them to make sure your experience is the best that it can be, especially if you're going to take one vacation a year and spend your hard earned money? That's where we all come in, right? So then people ask, how do you get compensated? Well, the vendors compensate us on the back end. So there's no cost to the client on the front end, so we get a kickback from the vendors in the back end. And so if someone comes to us and they say, "I would really like to go to Walt Disney World with my family, please plan this," we do from start to finish and we take care of their dining reservations, their FastPasses, flights, resort ticket, all those kinds of things that happen, and it's at no extra cost to them. Furthermore, after we do that for a lot of clients the first time, they come back and they go, "I would never use anybody else again because you guys are phenomenal."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow. Okay, so this is really interesting. I just want to clarify one thing, because, I mean, we've known each other for 100 years, long before you were doing what you were doing, and I was doing what I'm doing. By kickback, you mean just they give you a fee. This is all like declared to the IRS and everything, just in case, just to avoid emails, you mean?

Adam Duckworth:

Oh, yes. Let me say it in a different way. Oh, no, they pay us a commission on the sale and then they send us a very large 1099 at the end of the year.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's right. You got to fill out all those forms. I know all about that. Yeah, 100%.

Adam Duckworth:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I just wanted to clarify because sometimes the way that term is used, which is really interesting. So let's go back to the beginning in 2012. How did this... because entrepreneurship is so hot these days, right? And I want to talk about how you've structured your company, how you've grown your company, how you've gained all this traction in so little time. But take us back to what you were thinking in 2012 when it was you on your sofa with a laptop. What were you thinking?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, I'll tell you what I was thinking because I remember it very vividly. I was a travel agent working for a company in Ohio.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow. Oh, wait, you did that part time. That's right.

Adam Duckworth:

I did. Well, because I was trying to help my friends and family go to Disney. I loved it. It was my passion. So I just did it. I was a travel agent and the company I worked for was very not forward thinking. They were never going to grow a brand. There were good people involved in it, however, they weren't going to go anywhere or do anything. And frankly, if I can lay the cards on the table, because who knows who's listening to this, even from a part of that organization, is that they were fairly unorganized and mismanaged, and I said, "I don't want to be a part of this anymore." And I knew based on personnel and the people I was working with that I couldn't help them get to the next level. I knew I had to go out on my own and do it. Plus, the payouts from this particular travel agency were not great. They were not in the favor of the travel agent.

Adam Duckworth:

So what I did is I sat on my couch and I dreamed up Travelmation, and I said, "I'm not going to take what I'm discontent about and cast that on to other people. I'm not just going to create the same thing." I flipped the payout structure based on what I was discontent about and gave more to the agents on the front end, which is one of the things that our team has, I think, benefited from long term in terms of growth. So with all that to say, I let the discontentment of an organization that I was a part of, lead me into where I'm at today. Interestingly enough, Carey, about three years after, we started Travelmation. We absorbed the company that I used to work for.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You ended up buying them out. That's awesome.

Adam Duckworth:

We didn't even buy them out. They came to us and asked if we would take them over because they didn't really know... I mean, they knew what they were doing in terms of the travel industry, in terms of knowledge about destinations, but they didn't know what they were doing necessarily from running an agency perspective. They were knowledgeable about the travel, but that's only half the battle, right? You have to be so knowledgeable about how to build a brand and how to take it to the next level, and how to actually develop a strategy that people want to be a part of. That's what was lacking. That's what I brought to the table that was different.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what was the advantage to you in absorbing them, taking them over?

Adam Duckworth:

More revenue under our books, more people selling our brand, and so they wanted to do that. Plus, I mean, our commission structures were very aggressive in the industry in terms of the agent, we did that on purpose. Again, at that point in time in the company's history, I was interested in going, how do we go to the next level? And I thought, there are people here who've been in the industry a while, they might be able to come and bring something to our team. And sure enough, they did.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow. Okay, so you started that in 2012. Take us through the arc and a couple of pivot points or points where things really kind of took off, key markers in your timeline.

Adam Duckworth:

Sure. So again, starting the company in 2012, just me, was a very interesting thing, because I honestly didn't think that it would be anything bigger than me just planning a couple of family and friends' vacations a year. I did not expect it to get-

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're a solopreneur, I'm going to work for myself rather than someone else.

Adam Duckworth:

That's right. And I never expected to leave the local church either. I kind of expected that this would just be a side gig. Everybody in ministry has a side hustle, right? That's what they all say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Seems that way, yeah.

Adam Duckworth:

Because that was going to be my side hustle. So then there was a point in time where a woman named Michelle, who is now one of our VP, she's our VP of events, saw on social media that I was doing this. Now, the interesting story about Michelle and I's relationship is, is that I worked for Michelle in college. I was a waiter at a bar that she owned in Toledo, Ohio area. So Friday and Saturday nights, I would go pay for my tuition by serving at her pub and grub, right? And the old brick and mortars were consistently going out, and it was difficult specifically in the Midwest to maintain this. So she had gotten out of that industry, asked me if she could jump on board our team if I wanted someone to do this with me, and I said, "Absolutely."

Adam Duckworth:

We had had a couple of reps at that point. She came on very aggressive and really, that was a turning point for us when I had someone to bounce ideas off of, someone pushing me, someone thinking this really could be big alongside of me, which was really cool. So that was a mile marker in terms of our journey.

Adam Duckworth:

The other thing that I would say is, Carey, we started to do an annual retreat in Walt Disney World for our agents. We started with nine agents five years ago at the retreat. This year, we just wrapped it up in January, and we had 208 reps come to the retreat, and 10 vendors from the travel industry come. When we started that event and we started to almost have our annual conference, those were some big mile markers, because as much as I believe in the next generation of work and everybody working in their own environment, in their own space and being autonomous, which we can talk about that, I just believe there's something special when you get everybody around the table and have a rah-rah. And who wouldn't want to have a rah-rah in Walt Disney World?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Adam Duckworth:

And so we started doing this, and then it became a thing. We were taking promotional pictures in front of the castle, and then we had an opening night event where I casted vision, and consistently do this. And then, lo and behold, to the team, who shows up at the end of the event? Mickey Mouse himself, and all of a sudden, everybody is so fired up to be a part of what we're doing. And the interesting thing is, our reps in the travel industry consistently say to me, "No one in this country is doing what you do for travel agents. No one." They said no one puts on production like Travelmation, no one cares about their team. This is such a special thing that I am so excited. So those were just a couple of moments in the history of the company that I think are big.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's really interesting, because I've heard a growing number of business leaders say this. I think church leaders have a lot to learn from business leaders, but business leaders can learn from church too, and the one thing church does really well is production.

Adam Duckworth:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you look at that, the way a lot of churches put on weekend services, or do events, or communicate, we do that pretty well.

Adam Duckworth:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you took a lot of those what we call service programming skills and throw them into-

Adam Duckworth:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, you and I, we met at Orange, Reggie Joiner, right?

Adam Duckworth:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's few better events than the ones that Reggie throws. That guy knows how to throw a party.

Adam Duckworth:

He does. And I love Reggie and all he's taught me. I've learned so much from him. But, Carey, on our leadership team, so we have a leadership team of eight, five of the leadership team... No, excuse me, six of the leadership team all came from the church world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Adam Duckworth:

And one of our VPs was a former service programming director at a church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Brilliant. So hey, deputize that person for the retreat, right?

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah, absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can be amazing.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's cool. So can you explain, for those who might not be familiar with what we're talking about, why people are tapping you on the shoulder going, "Nobody does this."? What are you doing for them other than taking them to Disneyland, literally, or Disney World?

Adam Duckworth:

So the travel agency world almost died for a reason, because it was old. It didn't change with the times. It's very similar to the local church. The local churches that choose not to change, they encounter the same thing. Travel agencies wanted to be these brick and mortar shops where people would walk in, and they didn't support their agents necessarily. They didn't know how to rah-rah the team or build a

brand. They were still printing paper airline tickets, and all of a sudden, with the introduction of the online travel agency, people said, "I don't need them anymore."

Adam Duckworth:

So when people say like what they said to me, and they said, "Nobody is doing this in the travel industry," it's because we're not going back to the way it used to be. We're creating something completely brand new. We're creating something completely different because very few travel agencies have a brand. No one necessarily in the travel world... They're all the same. All the Disney agencies are the same, Carey, whether it's Mickey's vacations this, magical vacations this, fairy godmother this, castle consult. They're all kind of the same. So when Travelmation came around, and people first said, "What does that mean?" Because it's travel and animation combined. And all the brands are the same. The websites look like they're from MySpace era. They're all kind of similar.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It was right for disruption.

Adam Duckworth:

It was right for disruption, absolutely. So when we came in and we said, brand is really important to us, culture is really important to us, we want this to be the best place anybody's ever worked, we want them to know that they're supported with a clean, crisp brand that's out there that's focusing on digital and we're going to do everything we can to let people know they have a home and a place here, and we're going to help them take their book of business and their life to the next level, we've been winning at that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's incredible. Okay, so I love focusing on trends, so I want to test it. And you and I have chatted from time to time, but I see a couple of trends converging here in your company. One is, and I wrote about this at the beginning of 2020, but I really think we live in the age of pre-sliced apples. So if you think about the trend of DIY, I think that is morphing to, "Please do it for me. Just do it for me."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So for example, you can buy an apple, let's just say for argument's sake, it's 17 cents, but if the people at the supermarket or the store slice it up for you, they can charge you a dollar for the same apple. So if you think about that for a minute, it's kind of dumb. It's like, "Well, wait a minute. It's a knife. I have a knife. I could have done that myself in 30 seconds, but I'm going to pay somebody, and I'll pay almost 10x to have you slice my apple for me." I think that's a culture that is time famine, like nobody has enough time to slice their own apples, and decision fatigue. It's like, "Are you kidding me? I don't have time to make dinner. I can't even think about it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I think you're seeing the 'do it for me', that idea of a turn key. So we hinted at this earlier, but like a family rather than going on and booking on Disney and then booking their hotels on Trivago or whatever, and then booking a rental car, and then booking this, they're like, "We just want you to do it for us." What is under that, that you think?

Adam Duckworth:

I think it's a cultural thing, like you mentioned. I think we live in an Amazon Instacart world where we don't want to go do things, we want things to show up at our front door. And the other thing is, going back to what I originally said is that once you find someone you trust and they've taken care of your dollars from a vacation perspective, you're going to go back to that person again, because they've given you great service and you feel comfortable with them, and it is so easy to just text Adam, call Adam and go, "Hey, you have my family's file started. We want to go back to Walt Disney World. Set us up. And we know that you're going to handle all the details for us, and it doesn't cost us anything and we don't have to do anything other than communicate with you." Because, Carey, you got to understand something, Walt Disney World is overwhelming, specifically. It's very overwhelming.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I've been there a few times when my kids were younger. I'll tell you, it is overwhelming and you are dead by the end of the day.

Adam Duckworth:

This is not a relaxing vacation, right? It's one of those things that it's not relaxing, and it's very overwhelming because you can Google all day and look up attractions all day, but don't you want to talk to somebody who stayed at every resort on property and they've ridden every attraction, they know all the restaurants and they go, "Here's what my family likes. Just guide me so I don't have to do this myself, because I'm pulling my hair out here." That's where we-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's the idea of thinking for me, slice the apple for me, right?

Adam Duckworth:

Correct. It's the same thing. That's what we do specifically with Disney. And then why we've started to do so much other business, is because the trust has been built with Disney, now they trust us with cruises and all inclusive and hotels, all that kinds of travel-

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you have morphed out from that. I've seen you on a whole bunch of ships lately, some cruise lines you're representing. What else have you kind of morphed into? And then why did you choose those areas next?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, I think it's important for people to understand that even though we can have a niche and a marketing strategy related to Disney destinations, people are going to want to go other places in their life than Disney. And so why would we not be affiliated with and become experts with other brands that people want to travel to so we could take care of them along the way? That's why. And the dollars increase too. We want revenue to be in our organization. We want them to use us for all their travel. So that's why we have branched out. It was the very smart business move to make.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's interesting though, Adam. I want to ask you a little bit more around that because I can see it going either way. I can see some people, like Apple makes one phone, or now they make two or three, but Steve Jobs, it's like Samsung had 20, Apple had one. I was reading a piece in a business book this morning, and it was like this guy talking to a Samsung executive, he said, "It's really not fair because Apple only has one phone and they get put everything they have into that one phone, and we have to produce 30. So I don't get it."

Adam Duckworth:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I think I could see the argument going the other way, where they're like, "No, we're Disney. Nobody can out Disney us." So I'm just curious because I'm at the same crossroads. It's like, am I a podcaster, am I course, content creator? I'm probably going broader as well. But what were your reasons other than what you've already shared for going broad, or was that pretty much it? It's like, no. I guess your target isn't Disney so much as the customer, the client. Is that it?

Adam Duckworth:

Absolutely. And I think to answer that question as bluntly as I can, I think that families are eventually going to burn out of Disney. Now, I'm never going to burn out of Disney, okay? And it would be foolish to think, all keeping it within one concise Travelmation brand, because that's important to us, it would be foolish from a business perspective to think that we would not sell other things from a revenue standpoint. It's out there. So Carey, just to give you perspective, when we started out, we were 100% focused on selling Disney destinations, and that was it. For the first three years of our organization, that was all we sold was Disney, 100%. Last year, Disney was only 62% of our revenue.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, wow.

Adam Duckworth:

So 38% of revenue was from other places because, first of all, we can't be experts in everything. We understand that. But there are a lot of experts on our team who've traveled to these places, and so we kind of survey the team and lean into them when we have folks who go, "I want to go to Thailand. What does that look like? Can you help me do that?" And the answer is yes, we absolutely can. "I want to go on a cruise in the Mediterranean. Can you help me do that?" Yes, we can help you do that.

Adam Duckworth:

I think you're right, good business people with good brands focus, and we kind of focus and keep that all under the Travelmation banner, but we were left with no choice to branch out because we were going to leave so much revenue on the table.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I get it. And you're so focused on that family rather than just, sorry, only that family at Disney, right?

Adam Duckworth:

Correct. Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you want to be like... So you're trying to build a lifetime value of the customer. So if the Nieuwhofs sign on with you when we're 30, this could be a 20 or 30-year journey where you plan our annual holiday.

Adam Duckworth:

Correct. Absolutely. And the other thing that we get a lot from a lot of our clients is, "Hey, you've planned my Disney destinations vacation. Do you do other things? Can you plan a Royal Caribbean cruise for me?" We get that question a lot. So the answer is yes. And so we're trying to put ourselves out there with some different marketing this year to be able to make people aware of it, get some more exposure to them that we do do more, yet, Disney is still our bread and butter.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are the key differentiators? And we covered on a lot, but just as far as the travel agency goes. So you're a virtual company, and I want to get into workforce in a little bit. It's no additional cost to the client. What are some other disruptive factors about Travelmation that would be different from the traditional travel agent that we would have known growing up?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, you mentioned the digital component. There's no brick and mortar. Everything that we do is completely digital, which is a big deal. And the other thing is, so from the client's perspective, that's probably, they deal with people remotely in the ways that they want to deal with them. But from our perspective, these people are completely autonomous. They're their own boss, which they love. They're under our brand because they want to link a brand with their book of business, so we have some parameters that they have to follow. But Carey, the one thing I've learned in my life that I could not put a dollar sign on, is I've never been able to express how important it is for me to be my own boss, and these people are all their own bosses. They work as much as they want to work or as little as they want to work. We don't give them equipment that they have to use. They can use whatever equipment that they want to. We use cloud-based resources internally, so it works on any platform or any device.

Adam Duckworth:

What I love is that we have agents who are starting to live at travel destinations and kind of work from there, from the road. We had a couple who took their honeymoon, and the honeymoon was I think 70 days long, and they worked from their honeymoon. They went to Bali, they went to the Philippines, they were in China, they were in Thailand. That's what people want in 2020.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay, so let's go there, because you and I, and you at a much bigger scale, are running virtual companies. That was an early decision, sounds like it wasn't a hard one. But talk about the shifting workplace, because I've got this course, The High Impact Workplace, where I teach some of that from my perspective. I would love to know what you're learning because I think you and I are seeing a lot of the similar trends.

Adam Duckworth:

I have seen in the trends with the workplace changing is that, number one, people want to be with their families more. They really do. They don't want to go to an office nine to five. They just don't. Number two, generally, if you're going to an office from nine to five, there's generally somebody telling you what to do in your office from nine to five, and people are tired of being told what to do. They really are. The third thing is, is I really believe that being able to work when you want to work and how you want to work is the future of the workplace. I do not believe that we are going to see, specifically in the next five to 10 years, people consistently coming out of post secondary education and going right into a job that manages their time and gives them two to three weeks vacation time a year. Who would take a job that only had two or three weeks vacation time a year? I would go insane. I had that for a while, and I understand why I didn't want that in the future. And that's the thing.

Adam Duckworth:

Carey, it's interesting, if I can aside for a second, a lot of our people, specifically people who come from the church world or from the corporate world, they get almost nervous when they come to work for Travelmation when they go on vacation, and they're like, "Is it okay that I'm gone?" I said, "I don't manage your time. It has nothing to do with us. You go wherever you want to go." It's because there's been that culture for so long of fear related to it. You can't post when you're gone, and don't let it be known, specifically in the church, and this drives me crazy. But it's like you can't share that you're going to be gone too much, or that you're boarding a plane again, because we don't want the church members "who pay your salary" to think that you're not here enough. We've seen that really just dissipate. Again, you can't put a dollar sign on what that means.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's really interesting. So how do you manage that? Because we have a ton of employers from industry, church world, not for profit, the whole deal, listening, business leaders, and they're like, "Okay, I get it, the gig economy is growing. We have a whole bunch of independent contractors as well." But who gets their job done when they're not in the office? How do you manage that with 400 team members? Or what issues does that tend to create for you?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, we have contracts in place with every one of our independent contractors. So they're all travel agents, and if they don't abide by contracts, then legally, we can just terminate them if we would like to, or they can terminate us if they don't want to work with us anymore. That's fine.

Adam Duckworth:

First of all, let me just give you a couple of asides here, my friend. I have never seen someone work in a nine to five office from nine to five all day long. I mean, the amount of wasted time in a nine to five culture is unbelievable. I remember working in the local church and getting done with a meeting and going to see my buddy down the hall, and I was like, "What are you doing?" He's like, "Well, I'm done, so I'm just watching Netflix." And I'm not joking, because it's just like, I don't have anything else to do for the day, but I have to sit here till five o'clock. What a waste of time. But I also-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, The Office was popular for a reason, they resonated.

Adam Duckworth:

Absolutely. And so, Carey, to answer your question, I think the best leaders who are working in this new type of environment, work on results-based systems and not time-based systems.

Carey Nieuwhof:

100%.

Adam Duckworth:

Because it's like, who wants to manage people's time? Who has time to do that? Who has time to sit down and go, "I wonder what Carey is doing. Is he in his office? Is he working?" It's such a counterproductive culture to actual results. But I've also found what motivates people is not rewards like an office or something like that. What motivates people is the drive to do better for themselves. If our people don't sell travel, they don't get paid.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. So you are commission based, right?

Adam Duckworth:

We are commission based, and that doesn't work for everybody. Some people are like, "No, I need a base," and we're like, "Okay, this isn't the organization for you." But if you are motivated by that and driven by that, there's no cap on the amount of money you could make. You could make a million dollars a year if you really tried.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Adam Duckworth:

Which is insane, right? Because a nine to five culture does not allow for that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). How do people get there? How do people drum up their own business? How does that happen? How do you manufacture leads? Is that their responsibility or yours?

Adam Duckworth:

That is their responsibility to do. They're completely autonomous. They are using social media a lot. Now, we provide resources for them to do it. So we have a lot of marketing strategies and a lot of marketing calls that we do, but it's their sole responsibility to find the leads. Now, there are a lot of great things out there that they can use in the travel industry to get it. So I guess the point is, is that when you find some special people who are driven and who go, "I'm ready to drum this up myself," it can be amazing to watch how these people drum up momentum from the least. And I owe Mark Zuckerberg a lot. I really do, because Facebook has been massive for us. And you know how much money Facebook costs us? Zero.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Adam Duckworth:

I mean, we can pay for ads. I mean, we have paid for ads before, but to use it for not only our closed group for travel agents, but for agents to drum up business, it's unbelievably amazing what they've been able to do for free.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's amazing, isn't it? When you look at that. So they're responsible. How do you select? Because you now got workplace at relative scale. How do you select people who are cool with that? Not everybody is entrepreneurial enough to do that. They would be like, "No, I need you to send me leads, and then we'll see if I can convert some of these." Is there a process you use to figure out who's suited for that?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, Carey, it's so interesting, and I want to preface what I'm going to say with this statement. Someone at a travel event recently asked me, they said, "How do you hire your independent contractors, basically?" And it's very difficult because we have to go through the applications, we have to interview them, we have to look at their social profiles to see if we think this is something that they could do, first of all. We have a supervisor team that manages that.

Adam Duckworth:

But it's so interesting, related to the question that you just asked, because someone said to me recently at a travel event, and they were impressed by the size of our company of being like 400 independent contractors, and they said, "What was your job before you did this?" And I said, "Well, I worked in churches." And they said, "What did you do in churches?" And I said, "Well, I communicated and spoke a lot." I said, "But my main thing that I did in the local church was I worked with volunteers. In fact, I've written a number of books on volunteering," and they're like, "Oh, my gosh, we've just put it together. Working with independent contractors is exactly like working with volunteers."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ah, you're right.

Adam Duckworth:

And I never thought about it that way, and I love volunteers. I still do it at my local church. And I'm like, "This is why we're winning, because we've taken those strategies and we've put them into practice in working with independent contractors." And much like volunteers, you don't know who's going to be good at what. You just don't. You're trying to plug them in, they're going, "Okay, I'm in for this. How do I do this?" And so it's hard to figure out their right spot with us, just like it's hard to figure out where volunteers fit. But once we figure out, we get some of those people in the right places, man, watch them soar.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, this is fascinating, and we'll link to episode 92 when you were first on.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You have written some books on volunteers, but just to touch down on it, we'll link to your book. What are one or two of the principles that work with volunteers that also work with independent contractors?

Adam Duckworth:

They don't have to do anything if they don't want to. They have no obligation to do anything, which means your culture has to be the thing that inspires them. That's so important to me. If your culture and purpose behind what they do inspires them, forget it, they'll show up all day long. Now, with Travelmation, there's dollars attached to it when they do that. But I mean, we cast a vision last year about our culture not only as an organization, but the way that we serve our clients, focusing on families and memories and these things that people make on vacations, and that you're the watch guard of over their trip. How inspirational is that, that as people get older and pass away, at their funerals, they talk about these vacations that they took? That's your responsibility. That's your job. They don't have to do anything. So it's got to be about inspiring them to win and creating a culture like that. That's so, so key.

Adam Duckworth:

The second thing related to volunteers that I've just taken forward as it relates to independent contractors is that all volunteers are not good at everything, and that's okay, and everybody is not going to be a travel agent and not going to be a great one, and that's okay. This is not the place for them. Don't be afraid of that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Yeah, that's interesting. Anything else on selection? How do you know that this person is going to be a good Travelmation team member, and whether it's like, "Nah, this probably isn't for you, Carey?"

Adam Duckworth:

If there is a strong social presence that they have already personally, we take a look at that as we evaluate. And that's one of our hiring factors. We have denied people based on like, we don't hire people who talk about politics all the time on social media. We think that is a complete lose for your company, for your future business. But we kind of look at people and we go, "How are you running social already? Are people interacting with you? Are you doing well on social from a personal standpoint?" Because people who do well on social consistently do well as travel agents. It's almost like a parallel.

Adam Duckworth:

We have some Instagram influencers who've joined the team, they all kill it. Our top sales guy has a phenomenal social presence and he's selling unbelievable amounts of travel, and he's got an amazing social presence. It's fantastic to watch-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting? Funny, I remember meeting, this wasn't Horst Schulze, it was another hotel owner, and he says that there are really surprising correlations. For example, the best valet and door

people at a high end hotel, actually, are gardeners and people who enjoy being outside. Really weird correlation. It's like, no, you're moving cars and opening the doors for people, they don't want an indoor job. If they love gardening as a hobby, if they love being outdoors, it's like, "Don't put me behind that desk. It's -20, and I'm out here. It's 90 degrees, and I'm out here." They just love being outside, and so they started looking for that correlation. That's really interesting, yeah, because I imagine it's a fairly high EI position too when managing a family's vacation. If you got somebody who's always posting dumb stuff to social or showing low emotional intelligence, that's going to translate in the company as well.

Adam Duckworth:

If you have a poor social presence, the people who follow you are not going to book with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, yeah.

Adam Duckworth:

I mean, it's just they're not going... Bottom line, they're not going to. If you don't seem engaged, if you don't seem engaging, if you don't interact with anyone, then they're not going to trust you with their trip, bottom line.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So we talked about some of the... like it's a meteoric journey for you to become such a major provider in a large company in such a short window of time. What have been some of the struggles? What have been some of the pain points, Adam?

Adam Duckworth:

I will tell you the largest pain point for me. It's not necessarily a pain point, as much as it is a struggle for me in leadership. And it's not something I struggle with, I think it's something that all good leaders struggle with when you have a leadership team like I do. The biggest struggle is keeping all those leaders on the same page. I said we could be the largest Disney Infinity travel agency in the USA if all of our leadership can just stay right on the same page, if our train can stay on the tracks, that's the phrase that I use. Because, inevitably, Carey... And Vince McMahon, who is one of the leaders I've learned the most from in my life, I don't know if you know who Vince McMahon is or not, but-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't, obviously.

Adam Duckworth:

He is the guy who started the WWE, World Wrestling Entertainment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Awesome.

Adam Duckworth:

Of course, that's become a billion dollar corporation. Obviously, he did something right, but one of the things he said is that the best leaders are the leaders who bring everybody into the room or the virtual room, listen to all the opinions, and then make a decision with conviction, and then the leaders follow them anyway. And that is so key to the way that I lead because I go, "You may not like what I have to say, you may not agree with what I have to say, but at least I'm going to tell you honestly what I think, and I'm going to have to make a decision."

Adam Duckworth:

I don't think our leaders tend to go off the rails because it's natural for human beings to have different ideas about the way that they think things should go. I have to consistently set that vision for the company because Travelmation is not just a travel agency, it's a brand. It's its own brand out there. So we have to, in the context of the brand, keep the train on the tracks. And if we can consistently do that, if I can do that, I think we're going to continually... the sky is the limit, my friend.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are some of the obstacles to keep it... I know we all know vision leaks and everything, but do you think digital makes it harder, like having a virtual company makes it harder to keep everyone on the same page, or not really, you think that's just a human condition?

Adam Duckworth:

I think it's a human condition. I don't think digital makes it harder because you can still keep in touch with everybody consistently, even from a digital standpoint. I just feel like with autonomy and freedom, which is what we give people, you get autonomy and freedom.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you do.

Adam Duckworth:

So with that said, we have to figure out how to keep brand going in the same direction, going in the direction it needs to go, with everybody having their own reins. And Carey, as God is my witness, I have no idea how we've done it as successful as we have so far, but it's gone really well. But that will consistently be our challenge, is keeping everybody on the same page.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When you think about your lead team, are there different expectations for your vice presidents, for your lead team, than you would have for your agents? Is there a tighter amount of synchronization that happens at that level, or still it's freedom and autonomy all the way around?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, for our VP, so they are all executors, right? So we have four VP. I love our VP team. So we have a VP of Events. I talked to you about her a little earlier, Michelle. We have a VP of Innovation and Strategy, his name is Alston. I think you know Alston.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think so too.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah, and then we have Tim, who is our VP of Development, so he runs all of our training. And then we have Christina, who's our VP of Admin and Finance. And so all of them have their own book of business, which they're free to run however they want to, but they also have some responsibilities from the company standpoint. That's where we just have to consistently try to be on the same page, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Adam Duckworth:

Because in their area, we want to give them freedom to lead, yet we also have to stay on brand. And that's the challenge. That's the most interesting thing. I will tell you this though, Carey. I've never worked in my life with a leadership team. I have a leadership team of eight, because there's three additional supervisors who don't oversee a specific aspect of the company, they oversee their own team, but I've never worked with a more excellent group of people in my entire life. They're phenomenal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, wow. How do you go about finding senior leaders like that? Are they mostly people you knew, or do you advertise broadly? How have you built the team?

Adam Duckworth:

I'm going to give you an answer that might be nontraditional to this question.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great.

Adam Duckworth:

In me choosing leaders on our team, I choose people that I can trust. I choose people who are almost my friends. And people go, "Don't hire your friends." I say, "I don't like that. Hire your friends." As long as you're an honest and good leader and you lead with integrity, it should never affect your friendship. And so a lot of these people who are in our leadership team are people who are friends, have been friends of mine for years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think you see that more and more. I look at a lot of entrepreneurs, and they're hiring people they went to high school with, they're hiring people that they've known for a long time, which is interesting. Anything else on the running or the scaling of the business? I mean, some days it must feel like you've got whiplash.

Adam Duckworth:

It does because, Carey, since the beginning of the year, we've gotten like 65 applications to be travel agents, and we're only in the second month of the year. And when you're listening to this-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah, you've had 65 new people who want to onboard.

Adam Duckworth:

Who want on board, right? That's a massive jump in terms of... And so scaling is always interesting to us. So one of the things that was really important for us in terms of scale was when new agents, and this can apply to any business, when new agents come on board, we wanted to let them know that they were supported. Support was a big thing to us because when you're an independent contractor and you're your own boss, yes, you are your own boss, but there's nobody holding you accountable. We do that on purpose because we don't want to run their life, yet we also want them to know they're supported. So we have a supervisor system in place that allows a lead agent, a supervisor to oversee their team of agency, and they're there for their support. That has allowed us to scale. Carey, we could scale up to thousands of agents on this team.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow. Well, you'll probably get another 100 applications after this thing airs.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah, I actually told our leadership team, I said, "Hey, I'm going on Carey's podcast. Are you guys ready to interview a whole bunch of people?" I said-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, even though there's 30,000 and 40,000 people who will hear this out episode, you're probably going to get a couple applications, I would think.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah, probably, and we welcome that. We just can't hire anybody from Canada. So if you're in Canada, sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, most of my listeners are American, which is great.

Adam Duckworth:

Good.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So just shifting gears a little bit, what makes for a great experience when a family visits Disney? Because I think just about everybody listening to this podcast either has been, will be soon, or hopes to be, some time, at Disney. What are some things that you're like, "Oh, if you want the icing on the cake, do this."?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, the first question we ask all of our clients, and I ask my personal clients as well, is I go, "Tell me what kind of experience you would like to have because this is your trip. I'm just here to help make it happen." And so some people get up and they go, "I want to go in. I want to be in the park from the

time it opens to the time it closes, all day." And I go, "We can make that happen." And then some people go, "I would love to do a couple of days in the park, maybe four or five, and I'd like to stay for a week, and I'd love to be leisurely the rest of them. Or I'd like to go..."

Adam Duckworth:

So the first question we ask is, hey, what kind of experience do you want to have during your Walt Disney World visit? Because it's all about us making the client's dreams come true. It's not about our dreams. Remember, I love the Country Bear Jamboree, Carey. There are a lot of people who are not going to want to go to the Country Bear Jamboree, and that's okay. So I think that we start there.

Adam Duckworth:

The second thing is, is we always try to give our clients some of the biggest and the newest and the best at Walt Disney World and other Disney destinations. So Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge has recently opened with their biggest attraction ever, Rise of the Resistance. It's unbelievable. So Hollywood Studios has gone through a massive transformation in the past five years, so we help lead our clients through that. There are some really special things that clients can do including the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique for little girls. You want to spend \$350 to make your daughter looking like a princess? We can handle that for you, no problem. So there're just special things that a lot of people don't know about because Disney is very overwhelming.

Adam Duckworth:

The other thing, Carey, is that one of the things that has become really cool in the past number of years at Disney is dining. A lot of foodies go to Disney because there's so many amazing restaurants on site. Our team has eaten at many of them, if not all of them. And so we just guide our clients to have that amazing food experience as well. You can have buffet experience if that's what you're looking for, you can have a character experience, or you can eat at the finest five-star restaurants in the United States at Walt Disney World.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, that's really cool, yeah. Because I mean, the stereotype is you're going to eat burgers and hotdogs for a few days, but that's not the case at all. Yeah.

Adam Duckworth:

You can do that if that's what you want to do, but you don't have to. There're some amazing restaurants. Some of my favorite restaurants are at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa. You'll notice that in my language as well that Disney has trained as well because I don't just say the Grand Floridian, I don't just say Walt Disney or Disney World, I say Walt Disney World, I say Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, because we have to say the full names when we're talking to people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ah, okay, that's it, Walt Disney World. There you go.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah. And so at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, they have some amazing restaurants that are there, five stars. Victoria and Albert's is one of the highest rated restaurants in the country. Some people

have no idea about the experiences you can have with dining at the Walt Disney World Resort. It's phenomenal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow, how did you get on Disney's radar?

Adam Duckworth:

So I have the travel agency and I got affiliated with Disney destinations, and all of a sudden, over the course of time, two things matter to Disney, as I think two things matter to many people in business, revenue and brand.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Adam Duckworth:

And we have both. So that's how we got on their radar.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because you're basically, every other picture I see on Instagram, you're with Mickey, hanging out with him, you know?

Adam Duckworth:

Oh, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's pretty cool.

Adam Duckworth:

Meeting with the boss, right? Like I got to go check in with the boss and make sure things are well, and he loves us and we love him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That fun.

Adam Duckworth:

It's so funny because I know you and I are shoe guys, Carey. We both like our shoes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Aha.

Adam Duckworth:

So I love my shoes. When I was working at a local church one time, I had a nice pair of shoes on. I was wearing them and I walked in, and somebody made a comment to me and they go, "Oh, nice shoes. This church must be paying well," and I go, "Nah, Mickey paid for these."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's funny.

Adam Duckworth:

And going back to that idea in the local church, there is something versus entrepreneurship versus being in the local church, that you are capped in terms of earnings. And that's not a bad thing, you're capped in terms of your earnings potential.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, in almost any job that you're not in control of, you're capped in on this, right?

Adam Duckworth:

Correct. Yeah, for sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So Adam, let's circle back to culture, because I hear this in almost all of your answers, like you're thinking about the experience of the guest, what you know about Disney and everything. What else do you do to really create a great culture in a distributed company?

Adam Duckworth:

Well, I think one of the things about workplaces and corporations, business places, churches, that allows them to not be what they could someday, I'm not going to say fail, but I'm going to say not be what they could someday, it's a lack of culture. So one of our highest priorities is on culture. It's so funny because people consistently say to me, and this is just a heartbreaker for me, but it's so true and I heard this so many times, people just say, "Thank you for what you do, because I've never had a boss or an organization that I actually feel like cares about me and not just what I do." I find that to be so interesting and I'm almost humbled by it. I don't know what to say in response to it other than, "Well, thank you so much for saying that."

Adam Duckworth:

But Carrie, I think that many of our leadership team members came from the local church. And amongst our travel agents, Christians or not Christians, because of course, we hire anybody, there's no prereq to be a part of our organization, we're kind of like a church. I mean, we are run like a church. And that is a very interesting thing, because all of us, even though we're not full time in the local church anymore, many of us in our leadership team, we've grown up in church and we love the local church. And so we've taken a lot of those values, those intrinsic values, and we have taken them forward.

Adam Duckworth:

Interestingly enough, so in our closed Facebook group, which is a resource that is unbelievable to our team, because they get questions, it's like a 24 hour a day, seven day a week help desk, they get answers within minutes, and it's amazing. But one of the things that people do a lot of times in the Facebook

group is they will ask for prayer. They'll ask for a prayer request for their family or friends or even a client who might be going through something. And someone said to me one time, it was a part of our team, "Could we create a separate Facebook group just for prayer requests?" And I said, "I don't want to do that." I said, "Because I want all of our team to see these requests and know that they're being prayed for by great people on this team." And we're travel agency.

Adam Duckworth:

That in itself is so powerful and cool, and it has also made me know... because there was a lot of personal guilt when I left the full time job at the local church, if I'm being honest. There just was. I fought against that. I didn't want to have that, but I felt guilty, because I started the organization. I started-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you started the church, and a couple of years after you launched it, you're like, "John, do you want to run this? Because I'm going to..." I remember that text or that phone call that you and I had, you were like, "Actually, I'm going to do this full time."

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah. By the way, John is doing... If you go back and listen to episode 92, you'll hear from John. John is absolutely killing it. And people say to me all the time, "You're still part of a church that you felt comfortable giving up the stage and just not being up there every week?" I said, "Absolutely. I do." I said-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Not that hard, is it Adam?

Adam Duckworth:

It's not that hard.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's not that hard.

Adam Duckworth:

John is thriving and killing it. I'm so proud of him and what he's done. It's awesome. Anyway, all that to say, there was a lot of guilt when I left the local church full time, but Carey, when I've seen what God can even do through an organization like Travelmation, you realize that the church is not just confined to those walls in any way, and there's so many amazing things happening.

Adam Duckworth:

We brought a kid at our opening night event on stage this year who was battling bone cancer last year, and we had a chance, a lot of our team did, to pray for him throughout the last year. He had just completed chemo right before our retreat. He'd gone through chemo for 10 months. Can they see my screen on YouTube if people are watching this?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. Go ahead and share that.

Adam Duckworth:

So it's just a fun thing. So this is a lightsaber I made at Galaxy's Edge. If you turn it on, you can see it goes green. It's Luke's lightsaber from episode six, and I made one when I went to Galaxy's Edge for the first time. Along the way, when this kid, his name is Nolan, came to the retreat, we gave him that exact lightsaber, a replica of it, and I said, "Here's the deal. You have one, I have one. When you see it, you're just going to know that you're being prayed for by a whole bunch of people and that you have an amazing future ahead of you." People were crying. I mean, it's just a very powerful moment, but our travel agency did that because we believe in that. That's what culture is.

Adam Duckworth:

And so when we put an emphasis there, man, we just feel like people engage. And it's not a fake emphasis either. A lot of times people go, "Oh, well, you're just doing this to build brand." No, we actually believe in this. We believe in it with all of our hearts, which is really key, I think.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think Adam, and I'd love your reaction to this, but I still, and I get in trouble every time I say it, but I'm going to say it anyway. I do think churches have a lot to learn from businesses because churches are not particularly well run a lot, but businesses have a lot to learn from churches. And if you look at where business is going, the emergence of ethical business and compassionate business and business beyond the bottom line, I've seen my company, you see your company really is ministry, and as a place where we care for people and a place where, wow, this is the best place I've ever worked, or this the best job I've ever had, or I feel valued. Do you see that as another cultural shift that is happening right now where there's more cross pollination?

Adam Duckworth:

100%, Carey, because I feel like, number one, I understand why church leaders don't like it when we say, "Hey, you churches could learn a lot from the business world," and they could. Some of the worst leadership things I've ever seen happen have been involved in the local church. I mean, I see a lot of bad decisions being made to where-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I hear you.

Adam Duckworth:

In fact, when we started Downtown Harbor Church, one of the things we said is we were going to take all the things that we didn't like and not ever do them. But I do think that the business world could learn a lot from the local church as well. I really believe that because, again, all organizations have their things that they go through and that don't work the way that they should, but the business grow could learn a lot about culture from the local church. I really believe they could.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And about caring for people, and about loving people, and all those things because you tend to be a commodity in business, and then sometimes we don't take the leadership end seriously enough in

church world. One of the reasons I love this podcast is we seem to mishmash between the two on a regular basis, which is a lot of fun. So tell me about where Travelmation is heading next and what's next for you, Adam.

Adam Duckworth:

Great question, Carey. It's one of my favorites to answer. So I said this at our retreat just a few weeks ago in Walt Disney World to our team. I said, Travelmation is going to be the largest and most influential travel agency in the Disney destination space, bottom line. Watch us soar because it's going to happen. I announced this to our team in 2019. We set out a goal. I set the goal in 2018, but we achieved it in 2019. I said, "Here's what we're going to do in 2019. We're going to double the size of the company. We're going to double the size of the company in terms of revenue and in terms of agents." And we did, we met our goals.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Incredible.

Adam Duckworth:

We put it out there and we totally slayed it. It was amazing. And now we're on our journey to become the largest and most influential travel agency in the Disney destination space. That's what we're going to be and that's what we're going to do. Not because we just want to be the biggest, it has nothing to do with that. It's because I truly believe that our culture in our organization is the best and it translates to our clients. And if we believe that we are the biggest and the best out there, and we're doing things to the best of our ability, why wouldn't we want more and more people to experience that? And so that's what we're going to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. And anything else you want to share, Adam?

Adam Duckworth:

Oh, man, I just would say, number one, a lot of people's hearts inside local churches... Can I just be blunt and transparent at the end of this, Carey?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, totally blunt.

Adam Duckworth:

I tell my journey, just briefly, is that I knew it was time for me to leave my job at the local church 16 to 18 months before I did it full time. We were not even in the church for that long yet, but I knew it wasn't for me and I was feeling the pressure of it. There are many people who are listening to this that this is you and you know that it's time and it's time to make some decisions, and you're making yourself and probably the church miserable by not executing what you need to do. For anybody who'll hear my voice, know that it is a painstaking guilt ridden hard decision, but it was the right one. And now, because I did get out of the way, our church is thriving and growing. It's doing amazing, and I'm still there to be a part of it. That's just my word, Carey, personally, to anybody who might be in that same boat themselves. It's a hard thing, but it was such a right thing.

Adam Duckworth:

The second thing is this, is that you never know what can happen with a dream and a laptop. It was one of those things where it used to be like a notebook and a dream or whatever. You never know what can happen if you just take a leap. You never know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can we talk about that guilt that you felt as you exited? Do you know where that came from, what part of that may have been healthy, what part was unhealthy?

Adam Duckworth:

I think that the local church has, unfortunately, throughout its history, created a culture of guilt. I believe that one of the things that I was told in my ministry career, and this was probably midway through my... I still have a ministry career, but it's just not full time anymore. One of the things I was told is, as we were sitting around, having a staff meeting, that there were some pastors who were no... I used to work at the church I was at, and they're no longer pastors, they were doing different things. They were real estate agents or maybe they were working in a different field, and it was said by the local church leaders that I was around, "Well, you know what that just really shows? That they didn't truly have a call to ministry on their life, or they would have been in this long term." That never left me, and I said, "Wow." And it was something that I completely, 1,000,000% being on the other side of it, disagree with.

Adam Duckworth:

I think that there is a culture of guilt inside the local church that if you're not, from a full time career perspective, serving Jesus, then you must not be fulfilling the perceived call on your life. I think that's a real thing that exists. The guilt was not healthy. The guilt was probably unhealthy, but I think it was normal, I think was probably natural. But once I got through that and I realized I'm not really going to give this a second thought ever again about my journey, through that, I've been able to watch God bless our organization in amazing ways, and He is still working through this organization, Travelmation, as much as He was using me inside of the local church as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What helped you move past that? Because I felt that a little bit too, right? And increasingly now, five years on the other side of the succession, I'm seeing, for 20 years of being a lead pastor, as an assignment, but I'm called. I'm just called to new assignment, which is to help people thrive in life and leadership, and it looks different than it did before, but that took a little bit of adjustment as well. What was the turning point for you where you're like, "Yeah, this is still very much a faithful use of my life."?

Adam Duckworth:

So ironically enough, through this, and I'll just be very transparent, I think that therapy is very good for people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it is.

Adam Duckworth:

I think that everybody should probably go through it once. I think it's very good. And so throughout this time, I was just talking to somebody, not in a medical way, but just kind of getting my thoughts out there and coinciding with that. There has been a movement in the Christian faith. Now, I have not Christian circles and even leadership circles where I have not read this resource, but there have been people around me who've read the book, *Girl Stop Apologizing*.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. Rachel Hollis. I haven't read it either, but yeah.

Adam Duckworth:

So I haven't read it, but I'm familiar with some of the concepts, and some of those concepts translate to everyone's life. And so throughout that, I started to just see some articles posted about that and some literature posted about that. I think that one of the things that I've really taken a hold of in my life in the past two or three years is, I am going to stop apologizing for being me. I have apologized for being me for 18 years ever since I started working inside of a local church. I was always sorry. I always felt like I had to apologize for making a decision or doing something that "I shouldn't have done" or dressing a certain way I never was comfortable with. And so I've stopped apologizing for things. I don't care. It doesn't matter to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting? Yeah, because I think there is kind of a cultural fit, and you fit or you don't, and on the edges of leadership. That can play out in a number of different ways. Thanks for being so transparent about that, Adam.

Adam Duckworth:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know you continue to be a huge supporter of the church that you helped start, and you're involved in it, engaged in it, and that's what I want to be too. This has been really refreshing. Well, if you're ready for a couple of people to apply, where can they learn more about Travelmation and about you online?

Adam Duckworth:

It's so funny because I always, when I do these things... I know this is about Travelmation, but when I sometimes do ministry gigs, it's so funny because people will want to talk about volunteering. Inevitably, there's somebody who will pull me aside after a speaking engagement or whatever, and they'll go, "How can I apply to be a Travelmation agent?" So let me just give you the pitch. If you're listening out there and want to be a part of the best travel agency in the United States, you can visit Travelmation.net and click the "Join Our Team" tab. And if you just heard me say that and you thought, "He should have been on the radio," I get that a lot as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There you go. Adam Duckworth, it's been a joy. I love it anytime we get together. Thanks so much.

Adam Duckworth:

Yeah, man.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This won't be the last time I'm sure. We're all going to be watching with great enthusiasm. And just thanks for your candor, and thanks for your honesty today.

Adam Duckworth:

Carey, thanks for having me. It's been my pleasure. Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, there was an awful lot in that podcast. If you want more, you can get the show notes at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode326, including transcripts. So we would love to just help you however we could. You'll find everything there for free.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, I just want to say too, what Adam was saying at the end about just sort of feeling the guilt trip for leaving professional ministry, that's something I talk about with a lot of friends, and I know we have a lot of business leaders. Here's what I believe as a Christian, and I know Adam would agree with this too. We're actually all in full time ministry. If you're a lawyer or an accountant or a firefighter or an electrician or a plumber or a nurse, there's a ministry aspect to what you do, and he's living that out in a very different way, as I will be in the future as well, not working directly for a church, but just kind of moving forward. I think it's really important that we see everybody, who's a Christian, being in some kind of ministry or having a ministry. And so I just want to add that to what we shared at the very end. Adam I've so much respect for what you're doing and so excited to see you changing the travel industry. That's super exciting.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, we got my What I'm Thinking About segment coming up, and I want to talk about less being more, meaning and insight, and the power of curated content. So maybe you're at the place where you're like, "I just don't have time to create content," there's a role you can play in helping people, and I'll share that with you in the What I'm Thinking About segment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Anyway, in the meantime, we've got fresh episodes coming up, and next time on the show, I'm so pumped to have Lysa TerKeurst back and she is going to spill the secret sauce on how to 10x your audience and craft messages that actually connect with people. Here's an excerpt.

Lysa TerKeurst:

My team has shown up to work on editing a chapter and found me bawling my eyes out, sitting at my gray kitchen table, begging them to find someone else to write this book, called the publisher, offered the advance money back, "I don't want to do this because I can't live this." And that's when my team would look at me and they would say, "Lysa, the fact that you don't want to write this is the biggest clue that you are the one to write this because you know what it feels like to be so defeated by a topic that you've got to learn to embrace." And so that's how you know that you will be able to approach a topic

with tenderness, and with the right kind of empathy, and with the right kind of awareness of the felt needs of your readers because it's something that you felt utterly defeated by.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's happening next time on the podcast. I actually took that training that Lysa is going to share with you. I'll tell you, it changed how I write and so much more. It's going to be a great episode. Subscribers, you get that absolutely for free.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also, coming up, we've got Gary Thomas, Mark Driscoll, Cathy Heller, Mark Miller from Chick-fil-A, Nir Eyal, who turned Silicon Valley on its head a few years ago, John Eldredge, Danielle Strickland, Michael Todd, Jo Saxton, and so many more. Subscribers, you get that all for free.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, make sure you check out the people who have partnered with us for this episode. Head on over to Pro Media Fire, check out their done-for-you social media posts before Easter. I mean, they can turn this around pretty fast. Go to ProMediaFire.com/carey. And then I would love to welcome you to The Leader's Circle. It's something that's only open for a few more days. So head on over to TheLeadersCircle.live before it's too late.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, for What I'm Thinking About. Well, actually, I'm sharing some of the ideas behind The Leader's Circle with you over these last few episodes. And the idea when we put this new program together, is that information is everywhere, and you've noticed that, right? Information is just everywhere today. A decade ago, it was scarce, now it's not scarce anymore. You have free TED Talks, you can get podcast anywhere. I think we'll probably... I don't know. This is just my own guest, but like at the end of 2019, there were 750,000 podcasts, not episodes, different podcasts out there. We'll probably cross the million mark. People are just bombarded.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so maybe you're a content creator or a church leader or somebody trying to get your message out going, "Well, do I really have to do more content? How am I going to add to that?" And obviously, there are new authors every year, new websites and new podcasts at launch, et cetera, but I want you to think about it a little bit differently. And here's what I'm thinking about, people are overwhelmed and I think we're moving into an era where less is more, where actually if you can just cut through the noise and deliver really, really powerful insights in a helpful way, you are probably going to gain traction. Also, while information is everywhere, meaning and insight are not. I mean, you know this on your social feed, right? You got all kinds of people who are just blabbering on about this or that or the other thing. There's just so much noise. I think what's still in rare supply is people who have a lot of insight and people who can just sort of cut through the noise and go, "Hey, here's what to pay attention to."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So when you think that, that's a tremendous opportunity, right? When you leverage your voice, when you're emailing your list, whatever that list is, whether that's clients, or customers, or attendees, or members, or whatever that happens to be, how can you be someone who does more by offering less. So

for example, I have an email that I send out to over 50,000 leaders every day. I usually keep it under about 100 words, and sometimes, well, definitely under 400, but sometimes it's like 50 words with a link to something that I think can help them. Maybe that's an approach, rather than doing more, you do less. That's the idea behind The Leader's Circle, right? It's not like, oh, here's 500 videos. It's like, you don't need 500 videos. It's like, here's one. This will move the needle for your team. Next month I'm going to share another one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another thing you can do if you're not a content creator is to curate content because most people just like, I don't even know where to find the good stuff. So what you could do is you could collect other people's content and send out a few links to people. And so I really think meaning and insight is in rare supply these days while information is everywhere. So when you're thinking about how to help the people that you serve and how to help the people you lead, you can also curate content, almost be a Blinkist, you know? That kind of thing where it's just a summary of some things that people who don't have time to read the book can figure out. So I think there's great opportunity there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So how can you actually leverage the strategy of less being more, of meaning and insight, and curating some of the best content out there for the people you serve? That is part of the thinking behind The Leader's Circle. I'd love to have you jump in there before it's too late at [theleaderscircle.live](#). And in the meantime, thanks so much for listening. I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

You've been listening to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. Join us next time for more insights on leadership, change, and personal growth to help you lead like never before.